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ABSTRACT

This paper documents a study that investigated the perceptions of assistant principals regarding their preparation for principalship. The primary contribution of the study is to provide answers to questions concerning the issues of principal shortages since assistant principalship serves as the training ground for principalship. Data for the study were collected from a review of the literature and from a survey of 130 randomly selected assistant principals of elementary, middle, and high schools. The data were subjected to an analysis of variance to determine if demographic factors contributed to differences in assistant principals' perceptions. Overall, the findings show that not all assistant principals aspire to the principalship. Most of those who aspired to be principals were male and in the beginning years of their assistant principalship. Many, however, confessed they lacked the experience needed to be principals. Further results of the study reveal that most assistant principals do not have sufficient on-the-job training to prepare them to be school principals. The report concludes that if public schools continue to recruit school principals by grooming assistant principals, an improved program of mentoring assistant principals needs to be in place. (WFA)

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Are Assistant Principals Prepared for Principalship? How Do Assistant Principals Perceive?

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Are Assistant Principals Prepared for Principalship?
How Do Assistant Principals Perceive?

Introduction

School assistant principalship is the door to educational administration. Most assistant principals start their administrative career by working with principals who serve as their mentors. They are assigned with administrative responsibilities of different nature to enrich their experiences and prepare them to be future school principals. How the assistant principals perceive themselves as they aspire to be school principals is of greatest interest to educational researchers.

Purpose

The purpose of this study is to investigate the perceptions of assistant principals regarding their preparation for principalship. This study is developed specifically to answer the following questions:

1. What do assistant principals perceive as the most important responsibilities of principals?
2. What do assistant principals perceive as the most important personal traits and skills/experiences to be principals?
3. What do assistant principals perceive as their most important responsibilities to prepare them to be principals?
4. What do assistant principals perceive as factors that most hinder assistant principals to be principals?
5. Do all assistant principals aspire to be principals? If not, why?

6. Do assistant principals perceive that they are adequately prepared to be principals?

Significance of the study

In examining the perceptions of the assistant principals in their aspiration for school principalship, the researchers intend to explore the assistant principals' insight on how they prepare themselves to be school principals. The primary contribution of this study is to provide answers to questions concerning the issue of principal shortage since assistant principalship serves as the training ground of principalship (Burkett, 1990). The findings of this study will be most helpful to school administrators who plan professional experiences for the assistant principals to be successful principals. Coordinators of administrators' preparation programs at the universities could use the findings of this study to align the contents and delivery of their programs to achieve a higher efficiency in the preparation of assistant principals.

Conceptual Framework

Researchers do not agree that the position of assistant principal (AP) is part of the natural progression to the principalship (Scoggins, 1993). Some see it as a stepping stone to the principalship, while others view it as a position in its own right. Marshall (1992) divided the APs she studied into three categories: (a) upwardly mobile, (b) career, and (c) plateaued. Marshall defined upwardly mobile APs as those who desired and were likely to obtain a principalship. Career APs were individuals who chose to remain in their positions because they were satisfied with their job. Plateaued APs were individuals who remained as APs because they were not able to obtain principalship. These APs may

have become frustrated while looking for principalships and thus altered their anticipated career paths.

Most researchers, however, agree that APs are not properly prepared for the principalship (Hartzell, Williams, & Nelson, 1999; Pool, 1999). Studies by Wright (1994) and May (2001) examined the principals' perceptions of assistant principals' roles and responsibilities. Wright asserted that instructional leadership was the most important training for assistant principals to be principals whereas, in May's study, assistant principals were found not playing their roles as they should.

This lack of preparation is largely because of the duties/responsibilities they are assigned as APs (Richard, 2000). The APs surveyed by Kelly (1987) did not have many opportunities to perform duties/responsibilities associated with the principalship--e.g., instructional leadership. Brown and Rentschler (1973) reported that the APs in their study were not actively involved in instructional leadership. Koru's (1993) and Olson, Chan, and Pool's (2000) studies of APs related similar results. In many cases, the only real contact with instruction seemed to be teacher appraisals. Since most of the APs' tasks were managerial in nature, little time was left for instructional leadership (Kaplan, 1999; Marshall, 1992). All the APs in Black's (1980) research realized they needed to spend more time as instructional leaders, but were not able to do so because of time constraints. Porter's study in 1996 shared the same point of view.

Franklin's study (1994) examined assistant principals' roles and responsibilities as perceived by principals and assistant principals themselves. The study revealed similarities in the ideal role and differences in the real role of principals and assistant principals. While Dennard (1993) found significant difference in the principals' and the

assistant principals' perception of the assistant principals' roles, the findings of Cole's study did not show any significant difference. In Scoggins's study (1993), principals and assistant principals agreed on the professional characteristics, roles, and responsibilities of assistant principals.

McElveen (1989) studied the job perceptions of assistant principals of more and less experiences. Findings indicated significant differences in the perceptions of assistant principals in job security, job responsibilities, job environment, and career plan.

Methodology

One hundred and thirty randomly selected assistant principals of elementary, middle, and high schools participated in this study. Each of them responded to questions in a survey instrument designed by the researchers to solicit the assistant principals' perceptions of their preparation for school principalship. Demographic data of the assistant principals were also collected to further analyze if they make any difference in the assistant principals' perceptions. Descriptive statistics of frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations were used to analyze the data relating to the perceptions of the assistant principals. Analysis of variance (ANOVA) was used to examine if demographics of assistant principals were factors contributing to the difference in assistant principals' perceptions.

Findings

Results of data analysis indicate that not all assistant principals have aspiration to be school principals. Although their perceptions of school principalship are in most cases supportive of findings in the literature, in many incidences, assistant principals have expressed unique ideas of how they should be prepared to be school principals. Assistant

principals in Georgia shared their special perceptions of the barriers to school principalship. Additionally, analysis of the assistant principals' demographic data yields interesting findings relating to age, gender, race, education and experiences. Specific findings of this study are displayed in the following:

APs' perceptions of principals' responsibilities

The five most important responsibilities of school principals as perceived by assistant principals were: *curriculum development* (frequency [f] = 80), *instructional support* (f = 79), *teacher observation/evaluation* (f = 79), *maintaining a safe climate* (f = 73), and *meeting with parents* (f = 63). In determining the importance of these responsibilities, the assistant principals ranked these responsibilities from 1 to 5 with 1 being the most important. As a result, *instructional support* (mean [M] = 2.24) was ranked the most important to be followed by *curriculum development* (M = 2.50), *maintaining a safe climate* (M = 2.73), *teacher observation/evaluation* (M = 3.10), and *meeting with parents* (M = 3.56). According to the assistant principals, the least important responsibilities of school principals were *supervision of athletic and extracurricular activities*, *coordinating transportation*, *cafeteria supervision*, and *completing purchase orders*. (See Table 1)

Table 1 Most and Least Important Responsibilities of Principals as Perceived by Assistant Principals

	Frequencies	Min.	Max.	Mean	Standard Deviation
Most Important Responsibilities:					
Instructional support	79	1.00	5.00	2.24	1.27
Curriculum development	80	1.00	5.00	2.50	1.33
Maintaining a safe climate	73	1.00	5.00	2.73	1.68
Teacher observation/evaluation	79	1.00	5.00	3.10	1.49
Meeting with parents	63	1.00	5.00	3.56	1.09
Least Important Responsibilities:					
Supervision of extracurricular activities	1	5.00	5.00	5.00	0.00
Supervision of athletic activities	2	4.00	5.00	4.50	0.71
Coordinating transportation	2	4.00	5.00	4.5	0.71
Completing purchase orders	2	3.00	3.00	3.00	0.00
Cafeteria supervision	1	3.00	3.00	3.00	0.00

APs' Perceptions of Principals' Personal Traits and Skills/Experiences

Assistant principals identified three most important personal traits and skills/experiences principals need to possess to be successful. The personal traits and skills/experiences were ranked in separate categories from 1 to 3 with 1 being the most important. Results of the analysis revealed that the three most important personal traits are, by descending order of importance, *ability to formulate/implement a vision* (f = 84; M = 1.40), *organizational skills* (f = 61; M = 2.02), and *consistency* (f = 43; M = 2.28). (See Table

2) The three most important skills/experiences are, by descending order of importance, *communication skills* (f = 105; M = 1.50), *experience with instructional leadership* (f = 77; M = 1.95), and *experience in curriculum development* (f = 46; M = 2.15). (See Table 3)

Table 2 Importance of Principals' Traits as Perceived by Assistant Principals

	Frequencies	Min.	Max.	Mean	Standard Deviation
Ability to formulate/implement a vision	84	1.00	3.00	1.41	0.64
Organizational skills	61	1.00	3.00	2.02	0.79
Consistency	43	1.00	3.00	2.28	0.77
Honesty	34	1.00	3.00	1.94	0.81
Fairness	32	1.00	3.00	2.53	0.62
Enthusiasm	22	1.00	3.00	2.18	0.85
Willingness to take risks	20	1.00	3.00	2.30	0.66
Collegiality	17	1.00	3.00	2.41	0.80
Dependability	16	1.00	3.00	2.06	0.77
Assertiveness	14	1.00	3.00	2.00	0.68
Patience	13	1.00	3.00	2.31	0.85
Political savvy	11	1.00	3.00	2.00	0.89
Loyalty	6	1.00	3.00	2.33	.82
Creativity	5	1.00	3.00	1.80	.84

Table 3 Importance of Principals' Skills/Experiences as Perceived by Assistant Principals

	Frequencies	Min.	Max.	Mean	Standard Deviation
Communication skills	105	1.00	3.00	1.50	0.71
Experience with instructional leadership	77	1.00	3.00	1.95	0.83
Experience in curriculum development	46	1.00	3.00	2.15	0.63
Delegation skills	39	1.00	3.00	2.28	0.69
Training in total quality management	20	1.00	3.00	2.50	0.69
Budget experience	20	2.00	3.00	2.65	0.50
Training in site-based management	15	1.00	3.00	2.33	0.72
Experience on grade level	13	1.00	3.00	2.46	0.78
Associating with the 'right' people	13	1.00	3.00	1.77	0.93
Development of an innovative program	12	1.00	3.00	2.33	0.89

Assistant Principals' Perceptions of Their Own Responsibilities

Assistant principals recognized their five most important responsibilities by ranking them from 1 to 5 with 1 being the most important. Results of data analysis showed that they were *instructional support* (f = 97; M = 2.00), *teacher observation/evaluation* (f = 84; M = 3.12), *curriculum development* (f = 74; M = 2.35), *student disciplinary procedures* (f = 63; M = 3.11), and *maintaining a safe climate* (f = 57; M = 2.74). (See Table 4) These five most important responsibilities were chosen out of 25 common responsibilities of assistant principals revealed in literature.

Table 4 Importance of Assistant Principals' Responsibilities as Perceived by Themselves

	Frequencies	Min.	Max.	Mean	Standard Deviation
Instructional support	97	1.00	5.00	2.00	1.10
Teacher observation/evaluation	84	1.00	5.00	3.12	1.40
Curriculum development	74	1.00	5.00	2.35	2.35
Student disciplinary procedures	63	1.00	5.00	3.11	1.59
Maintaining a safe climate	57	1.00	5.00	2.74	1.47
Meeting with parents	52	1.00	5.00	3.60	1.14
Staff development	43	1.00	5.00	3.33	1.19
Developing enrichment programs	41	1.00	5.00	2.98	1.31
Reviewing lesson plans	24	2.00	5.00	3.67	1.01
Supervision of classified staff	15	1.00	5.00	3.40	1.35
Budget preparation	13	1.00	5.00	3.77	1.24
Developing the master schedule	12	1.00	5.00	3.50	1.45
Maintaining school facilities	11	2.00	5.00	3.55	1.21
Developing and supervising duty schedules	9	2.00	5.00	3.89	1.27
Preparing reports	5	3.00	5.00	4.00	0.71
Attending special education meetings	5	3.00	5.00	4.00	1.00
Attending district-level meetings	4	2.00	5.00	4.25	1.50
Arranging for substitutes	4	1.00	5.00	3.25	1.71
Monitoring student attendance	4	3.00	5.00	4.25	0.96
Supervising extracurricular activities	4	3.00	5.00	4.5	1.00
Coordinating transportation	4	2.00	5.00	4.00	1.41
Cafeteria supervision	3	5.00	5.00	5.00	0.00
Ordering/maintaining textbooks	2	3.00	5.00	4.00	1.41
Supervising athletic activities	2	3.00	4.00	3.50	0.71
Completing purchase orders	1	5.00	5.00	5.50	0.00

Hindrance of Assistant Principals to Principalship

Table 5 shows 14 factors assistant principals indicated that could possibly hinder their promotion to principals. The survey was designed in a 3-point scale with 1 being the most important and 3 being the least important. The 5 factors that most hinder their advancement were *lack of experience* (f = 70; M = 1.66), *too outspoken* (f = 39; M = 2.05), *lack of sponsor in the system* (f = 36; M = 2.06), *shortage of available principalships* (f = 33; M = 1.85), and *unwillingness to relocate* (f = 33; M = 2.30).

Table 5 Perceived Factors Hindering Assistant Principals to be Principals

	Frequencies	Min.	Max.	Mean	Standard Deviation
Lack of experience	70	1.00	3.00	1.66	0.80
Too outspoken	39	1.00	3.00	2.05	0.83
Lack of sponsor in the system	36	1.00	3.00	2.06	0.79
Shortage of available principalships	33	1.00	3.00	1.85	0.80
Unwillingness to relocate	33	1.00	3.00	2.30	0.68
Considered too valuable in current position	31	1.00	3.00	1.87	0.85
Working under an ineffective principal	27	1.00	3.00	2.15	0.82
Lack of support from faculty	22	1.00	3.00	1.91	0.87
Unfamiliar with district or school	12	1.00	3.00	2.33	0.89
Race	11	1.00	3.00	1.82	0.87
Too old	9	1.00	3.00	1.89	0.78
Too young	8	1.00	3.00	2.75	0.71
Sex	7	1.00	3.00	2.14	0.69
Too many years as an assistant principal	7	1.00	3.00	2.00	0.82

Assistant Principals' Aspiration for Principalship

Data analysis showed that 77% of the assistant principals surveyed expressed their aspiration to be school principals. Of the 23% who preferred to remain as assistant principals gave nine reasons to justify their choice. The five most important reasons out of the nine, according to their ranking (1 = of little importance; 5 = of great importance), were *wish to remain in present position* (f = 28; M = 3.93), *too much stress in principalship* (f = 27; M = 3.74), *too much responsibility/liability* (f = 27; M = 3.60), *too much time commitment* (f = 27; M = 3.44), and *principal selection usually determined prior to interview* (f = 27; M = 3.19). (See Table 6)

Table 6 Assistant Principals' Reasons for Remaining as Assistant Principals

	Frequencies	Min.	Max.	Mean	Standard Deviation
Wish to remain in present position	28	2.00	5.00	3.93	1.02
Too much stress in principalship	27	1.00	5.00	3.74	1.38
Too much responsibility/liability	27	1.00	5.00	3.60	1.47
Too much time commitment	27	1.00	5.00	3.44	1.48
Principal selection usually determined prior to interview	27	1.00	5.00	3.19	1.42
Close to retirement	28	1.00	5.00	2.96	1.90
Unwilling to relocate	27	1.00	5.00	2.81	1.62
Monetary compensation inadequate for job requirements	26	1.00	5.00	2.73	1.43
Unable to obtain a principalship in current school district	27	1.00	5.00	2.07	1.17

Assistant Principals' Perception of their Preparation for Principalship

As seen in Table 7, the five administrative duties and responsibilities identified by assistant principals as most important for their preparation for principalship are curriculum development (80 times), instructional support (79 times), maintaining safe climate (73 times), meeting with parents (63 times), and teacher observation/evaluation (79 times). When assistant principals were asked to rank administrative duties and responsibilities of their priority, curriculum development was checked 74 times; instructional support, 97 times; maintaining safe climate, 57 times; student discipline, 63 times; and teacher observation/evaluation, 84 times. Evidence is clear that assistant principals perceived their top priority duties and responsibilities as those that would prepare them for principalship. However, the assistant principals did not perceive that the duties and responsibilities they spent most time on were the most important duties and responsibilities that would prepare them for principalship. This was indicated by data on Table 7 showing that the five duties and responsibilities that took most of their time were student discipline, cafeteria supervision, meeting with parents, maintaining safe climate, and teacher observation/evaluation. It is clear that curriculum development and instructional support, the most important duties and responsibilities that would prepare them for principalship, were not on the list of top five they spent their time on. Data indicated that most assistant principals were assigned with time consuming duties and responsibilities that took up their time to spend on more student achievement related duties and responsibilities.

Table 7 Assistant Principals' Perception of Their Preparation for Principalship

	Number of times administrative duties identified by APs as most important to their preparation for principalship	Number of times administrative duties identified by APs as their top priorities	Number of times administrative duties identified by APs as work taken most of their time
Curriculum Development	80	74	
Instructional Support	79	97	
Teacher Observation/ Evaluation	79	84	74
Maintaining Safe Climate	73	57	47
Meeting with Parents	63		72
Student Discipline		63	107
Cafeteria Supervision			40

Assistant Principals' Demographics and Differences in Their Perceptions

Difference in assistant principals' perceptions of their aspiration for principalship was examined by categories of age, gender, race, and experience. Analysis of variance was used to determine if significant difference existed among the categories of demographic variables in assistant principals' perceptions of principals' responsibilities (25 items), principals' personal traits (14 items), principals' skills/experiences (10 items), assistant principals' responsibilities (25 items), hindrance to principalship (15 items), aspiration to principalship (1 item), and reasons for remaining as assistant principals (9 items).

Of the 99 perception variables examined, differences in age were found only in 5 variables. Differences in gender were found in 6 variables, and differences in race were found in 4 variables. Additionally, differences in experiences were found in 8 variables. Therefore, it can be summarized that, in general, assistant principals' demographic variables made very little difference in their perceptions of preparation for principalship. An exception is made to the perception variable, aspiration to principalship, that was tested 4 times for ANOVA with 2 times showing significant differences in gender and experience. Data revealed that male assistant principals had greater aspiration for principalship while more experienced assistant principals had less aspiration for principalship. (See Table 8)

Table 8 ANOVA -- Assistant Principals' Perceptions by Age, Gender, Race, and Experience of Assistant Principals

		Number of Variables Found to have Significant Differences at .05 Level			
Assistant Principals' Perceptions	Number of Variables Tested	Age	Gender	Race	Experience
Principals' Responsibilities	25	2	1	0	2
Principals' Traits	14	1	0	2	2
Principals' Skills/Experiences	10	0	2	0	1
Assistant Principals' Responsibilities	25	0	0	1	1
Hindrance to Principalship	15	0	0	0	0
Aspiration to Principalship	1	0	1	0	1
Reasons for Remaining as Assistant Principals	9	2	2	1	1

Discussion

The findings of this study are basically in support of the findings of the current literature. First, assistant principals were asked to identify the most important responsibilities of school principals and then those of themselves. Incidentally, the five most important responsibilities of principals (*instructional support, curriculum development, maintaining a safe climate, teacher observation/evaluation*, and *meeting with parents*) came very close to those five most important assistant principals' responsibilities identified by the assistant principals (*instructional support, teacher observation/evaluation, curriculum development, student discipline*, and *maintaining a safe climate*). What it means is that assistant principals knew the principals' responsibilities as well as theirs. As they prepare themselves to be principals, they need to recognize that their responsibilities should be the same, and as important, as the principals' responsibilities. However, in identifying the hindrance to principalship, the assistant principals ranked *lack of experience* as the worst hindrance. The gap is clear. If they had been assigned to assume the most important administrative responsibilities, they should not have been left behind as administrators lack of experience. The fact is that most assistant principals did not spend enough time with curriculum responsibilities to prepare them to be school principals. Second, the assistant principals ranked *lack of sponsor in the system* as one of the most important reasons to remain as assistant principals. They also highlighted *school districts identified person prior to interview* as a serious hindrance to their aspiration for principalship. Findings in this study disclose the assistant principals' uncertainty of how personnel business is handled at the school district level. The recruiting process of school

principals needs to be examined to ensure that assistant principals are given a fair opportunity of employment.

Conclusion

Most of the assistant principals aspired to be principals were male and in the beginning years of their assistant principalship. They knew what it took to be school principals and attempted to align their assignments with the responsibilities of school principals. However, many of them confessed that they lacked the experiences needed to be principals. Results of this study point to the fact that most assistant principals do not have sufficient on-job training to prepare them to be school principals. If the trend of public schools is to recruit school principals by growing their own, then an improved program of mentoring assistant principals needs to be in place. Principals could play a significant role in preparing assistant principals to assume the principalship.

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